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Football violence

Editorial

This issue of the *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* is published just before the start of the European Football Championship in Belgium and The Netherlands. As all Europeans know, this tournament is one of the main sport events in Europe: a three week spectacle of sport tension and . . . violence. Although football (for Americans: soccer) always has had some sort of aggressive undertone, over the last 30 years football has been transformed into a troubling sort of criminogenic event.

The eve of the first major sporting event of the millennium is a propitious time to reflect on a problem which has plagued professional football in Europe for the past few decades: crowd disorders and spectator violence. At least three general observations can be made on the subject: football violence is a relatively young phenomenon; violence seems to be related especially to football and not to other sports, so this kind of violence is relatively unknown in Northern America (US and Canada). In this issue these and other issues of this very complex social phenomenon are analysed and discussed.

The issue opens with an article on the preparations for the Euro 2000 tournament with regards to safety and security problems. *Erwin Muller et al.* describe the audit-instrument (a 'checklist') which was developed to measure the thoroughness and integrity of the schemes. Whether the preparations were successful in controlling hooliganism will be discussed by the same author in the next issue.

Eric Dunning endeavours to construct a sociological diagnosis of football hooliganism as a world phenomenon, exploring how far it can be theorised and understood. 'Football hooliganism' is a complex and many-sided phenomenon. Dunning, on the basis of data generated via an analysis of English newspaper coverage, examines the definition, incidence, football-related murders, and popular and academic explanations of this worldwide phenomenon. In his view 'football hooliganism' is a construct of politicians and the media. As such, it lacks precision and is used to cover a variety of forms of behaviour which take place in more or less directly football-related contexts. Despite these differences, there is substantial consistency between Scottish, Belgian, Dutch, Italian and English findings.

As a basis for further, cross-national research, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the problem is fuelled by the 'fault-lines' of particular countries. In England, that means social class and regional inequalities; in Scotland and Northern Ireland, religious sectarianism; in Spain: the linguistic sub-nationalisms of the Catalans, Castilians, Gallegos and Basques; in Italy, city particularism and perhaps the division between North and South as expressed in the formation of 'the Northern League'; and in Germany, the relations between East and West and political groups of the left and right.

Julian V. Roberts and Cynthia J. Benjamin explore football hooliganism from a North American perspective, and try to find explanations for the relatively low levels of spectator violence compared to Europe. Particular emphasis is placed on comparisons between professional ice hockey in North America and European football. There are a number of complex cultural and contextual variables, which the authors explore in this article. If there are any lessons for Europeans from the North American experience, it would appear to involve facilitating the conditions which make the public expression of spectator violence a socially-inappropriate response to events on the field or encounters with other fans after the game. These conditions include importing the ethos of spectatorship to counter the participant perspective of European football fans.

Antonio Roversi and Carlo Balestri outline certain aspects of the current situation of football hooliganism in Italy. The term 'football hooliganism' is used to indicate two distinct phenomena. The first one has to do with so-called 'spectator disorderliness' – which usually occurs within the stadium, and is aimed at the players, referees, linesmen, managers, and trainers. The second one concerns the

acts of vandalism and systematic aggression of – in Italy – the ‘ultras’ groups against similar opposing groups both within and outside the stadiums. The authors try to explain the current situation and the most recent changes. The number of incidents over the last years has decreased, but at the same time the sort of violence has changed: it turns against the police; it declines into pure vandalism and juvenile deviance. An important moment was the crisis caused by the death of an ultras in 1995; it marked a turning point between the ‘old way’ of the ultras and the new developments.

On the basis of eight football seasons – a total of 5,180 matches in the Belgian First and Second Division – *Stéfan de Vreese* reports on the phenomenon of hooliganism in Belgium. After the Heysel tragedy in 1985 the police began gathering statistical data on football matches. From these data information can be gathered on measures for making the stadiums more secure. The Belgian hardcore elements and the specific problems they cause can better be identified. In this way a risk analysis of each match can be made beforehand in order to anticipate actual problems in and around the stadiums.

In the *Current Issues* section *Karla van Leeuwen* describes the background and aims of the International Victimology Website, an initiative of the United Nations, the World Society of Victimology and the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice.